

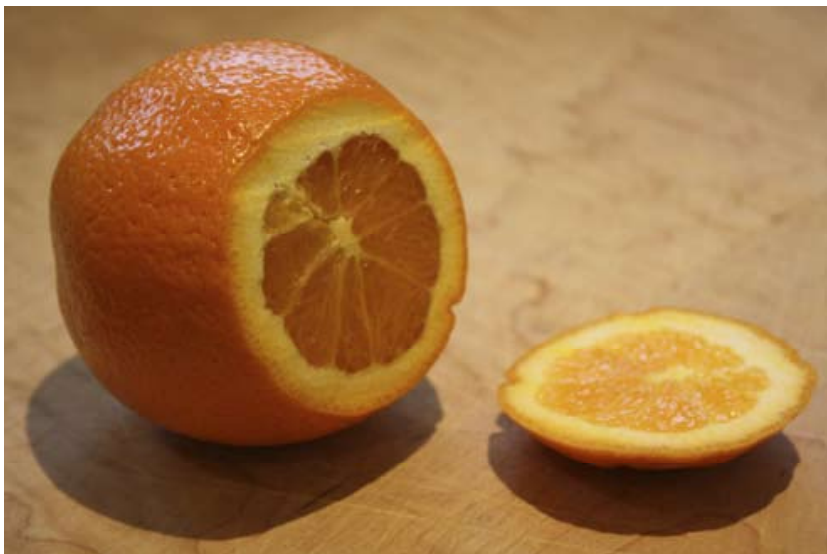
PHOTO SILLY

by Steve Sonheim

Light Quality and Light Color

Light Quality

This following shot is an example of **Specular** light source that creates nice texture and shine on the orange and gives a nice contrast... and creates some hard shadows.



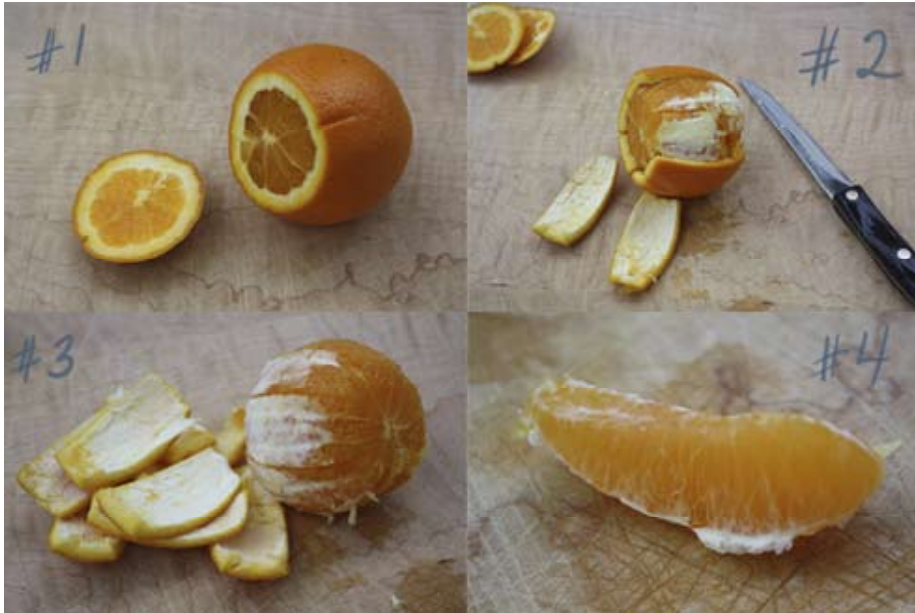
Photos by Kathleen Tesluk

This outside shot on the next page is a **Diffuse** light source and has nice soft shadows and transitions from light to dark. It works well to show what is going on in the shot because the light is so even. However, it lacks sparkle.

Our eyes are attracted to areas of high contrast and hard shadows create all kinds of shapes and negative space that can detract from our subject and message. That is not to say hard shadows are bad but, like anything in photography, we have to understand how they affect our shots and how to use them.

Overcast gray sky is not bad lighting in itself. It just has a specific type of mood and character that is not always what we want. We tend to like bright, sparkly things and tend to think that 'good' photos should be that way. But photography can communicate a full range of ideas and feelings beyond the happy "Kodak moment" and we can make those decisions.





The solution involves making choices based on what you want to communicate. The first shot says: Orange! Fresh! Bright!

The second shot says: Order, information, precision and clarity, and is the better choice for an instructional series.

To get the sparkle and shine of specular light and the soft, even shadows of diffuse light you have to have a careful balance of both types of light. Then you must exercise lots of control regarding where each type of light falls on the subject and background. This is why we have photostudios full of lights and gadgets.

Note: Specular and Diffuse are different because of the size of the light source relative to the subject. It is not an indoor vs. outdoor distinction. The Sun is a Specular source and the Sky is Diffuse.

We can do some modifications to make a more Diffuse light from a Specular source. One technique is to use a "diffuser" like a translucent sheet or material between the light and subject. Sheer draperies are exactly that. We can also bounce a Specular source like a light bulb off of a wall or ceiling to create a larger and therefore softer light.

Second, Light Color

Indoor or artificial light is warmer, more yellow, than outdoor light. Overcast sky is more bluish than sunlight and shade is slightly more blue than overcast. So if you did a chart you would have candlelight at one end (most yellow) and open shade at the other (blue) end. Open shade is an area blocked from the sun but open to the (blue) sky, like beside a tall building on a sunny day.

To get the right color in our shots, we need to set the White Balance. Most cameras have an Auto White Balance setting which works pretty well. However, like exposure, the camera can guess wrong. To correct it, you need to decide what situation you are in and set the White Balance. Usually it falls within: Sun, Indoor light (tungsten), Overcast, Shade, Flash and sometimes Fluorescent.

(Flash is very close to Sunlight but slightly more blue.)

Another, more accurate way to set white balance is to photograph a white sheet of paper under the same light as your subject and tell the camera: "This is white". Hence the term white balance. On your camera, this is called "Custom White Balance". Not all cameras have this and you will have to check your owner's manual to find the setting.

